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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001594

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [Z1](#)

SUBJECT: MDC OFFICIAL OFFERS MIXED ASSESSMENT ON CHURCHES'
INITIATIVE, SEEKS APPROACH TO MILITARY

REF: (A) HARARE 1571 (B) HARARE 1532

Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER WIN DAYTON; REASON 1.5 (B) AND (D)

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY: Gandhi Mudzingwa, MDC's Director of Presidential Affairs, on August 7 told poloff that mixed signals from ZANU-PF underscored the uncertainty surrounding the ongoing bishops' attempt to jump start talks. He reported that a ZANU-PF source had approached him about derailing the effort but that Mugabe's attitude on the talks remained unclear. Emphasizing the potential importance of the military in any resolution of Zimbabwe's political impasse, he signalled that the MDC would embark on a discreet effort to engage key military figures. He urged the USG to engage moderate ZANU-PF elements and to maintain pressure on South Africa to push Mugabe to the table. END SUMMARY.

[12](#). (C) Mudzingwa opened by expressing dismay over ZANU-PF's failure to demonstrate clear commitment to the process undertaken by the bishops (ref B), which he attributed to a clash of "personal interests" among key insiders. A nephew of Speaker of Parliament Emmerson Mnangagwa called Mudzingwa on August 6 to urge that the bishops' initiative be terminated, noting that Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa and Information Minister Jonathan Moyo had convinced the party that the bishops were not impartial. Mudzingwa observed that Mnangagwa, who remains Mugabe's favored successor, was not involved in any of the intra-party initiatives to communicate with the MDC and was likely to be an obstacle to all such initiatives. Others posturing in the run-up to potential negotiations, such as Chinamasa and Information Secretary Nathan Shamuyarira, were seeking to discredit each others' efforts in an effort maximize each's own influence. He concluded that most accepted the need for dialogue and change but ego clashes and mutual suspicion thwarted their ability to pursue an obvious shared interest in meaningful engagement.

[13](#). (C) Tempering his pessimism, Mudzingwa opined that Mugabe himself may yet be open to the bishops' process notwithstanding the squabbling and lack of consensus among his subordinates. Mugabe repeatedly had made clear through public signals and private communications that he wanted to step down; if he believed that the bishops's process could produce the conditions he required to step down, the initiative could still bear fruit. Mudzingwa detected signs that Mugabe remained open to some kind of constructive engagement with the MDC. ZANU-PF public characterizations of the MDC were becoming more restrained. The cabinet (read: Mugabe) reportedly had required Local Government Minister Chombo to suspend his effort to have the MDC-dominated Harare City Council dismissed. The country's downward economic spiral, buttressed by international pressure, had convinced most ZANU-PF members from top to bottom that significant change was necessary. Prominent members' posturing, while disruptive, evidenced their conviction that change would come and that they wanted to shape it. Nonetheless, the talks, if undertaken, were unlikely to go anywhere without the thorny issue of Mugabe's succession within ZANU-PF first being resolved.

[14](#). (C) Mudzingwa confided that the MDC had no contingency plans to pursue in the event that efforts to get ZANU-PF to the table failed. The MDC had yet to become very proficient at planning, something at which ZANU-PF always had excelled, he conceded. The MDC remained highly vulnerable on the breadth of their leadership. Although the MDC had wide popular support, Mudzingwa asserted, it lacked anybody beyond Morgan Tsvangirai who had the stature to command a national following. Like ZANU-PF, the MDC had no clear succession mechanism.

[15](#). (C) Characterizing the military as Mugabe's "final reliable pillar of support", Mudzingwa emphasized its potential importance in any political solution to the country's crisis. The MDC had yet to establish rapport with any key military leaders, even though many were deeply dissatisfied with the current situation and supported change.

Mudzingwa said he intended discreetly to reach out to some, more to reassure them about the MDC's posture toward the military than to seek their support. He urged the USG quietly to get the military to understand the need for national political dialogue and to reassure key officials about potential MDC governance. He said he intended to seek similar engagement by South African officials but thought the USG might offer "more muscle".

16. (C) In closing, Mudzingwa conveyed gratitude for the many facets of USG support for potential change in Zimbabwe. He urged the USG to maintain pressure on South Africa to push Mugabe to the table. The USG should "recognize" the bishops effort discreetly, being careful not to do so in a way that might give ZANU-PF elements more fodder with which to discredit them. Finally, Mudzingwa advised the USG to engage with moderate ZANU-PF elements such as Shamuyarira and Chairman John Nkomo, and those with strong ties to the business community, such as Matumwa Mawere and Saviour Kasukawire.

17. (C) COMMENT: The bishops' initiative continues to proceed on shaky ground. The timing and substance of ZANU-PF's overdue contribution to the talks' agenda may be a significant indicator of Mugabe's interest, the decisive factor in whether talks begin. Regarding its interest in reassuring the military, the MDC does not appear to have a policy for dealing with top military figures; an MDC approach to the military could alarm ZANU-PF elements and further disrupt nascent progress toward talks. Bishop Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe President Trevor Manhanga's meeting with the Charge on August 8 is reported septel.
WHITEHEAD